

Burr, Edwards spar

By JOHN WAGNER, Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON -- At the rate they're demanding apologies from one another, lawmakers from North Carolina appear at risk of becoming a "sorry" delegation.

Earlier this week, U.S. Sen. John Edwards, a Democrat, rapped U.S. Rep. Howard Coble, a Greensboro Republican, for making "ill-informed" and "divisive" remarks supporting the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

"He was wrong, and he ought to apologize," said Edwards, who is eyeing the White House in 2004.

Edwards' remarks brought a sharp rebuke Wednesday from U.S. Rep. Richard Burr, a Winston-Salem Republican.

"He owes Howard Coble an apology," said Burr, who is eyeing Edwards' Senate seat in 2004. "My outrage is over a member of our delegation taking a shot at the dean of our delegation without checking out the facts first."

Edwards' call for an apology from Coble stems from comments made by the delegation's longest-serving member a month ago on a Greensboro radio station. In response to a caller, Coble said that Japanese-Americans were "an endangered species" during World War II and said their internment was understandable.

"For many of these Japanese-Americans, it wasn't safe for them to be on the street," said Coble, the new chairman of a House subcommittee on homeland security.

While Democrats across the country have piled on Coble for his remarks, Edwards remained silent on the subject until Monday, when he provided a written statement to the Japanese American Citizens League, a Washington-based advocacy group. In the statement, Edwards said Coble "failed to lead" and that Republicans should "seriously reconsider" his subcommittee chairmanship.

"Someone who thinks it was OK for the United States to put innocent Americans behind barbed wire fences in 1942 should not make decisions about how to protect Americans in 2003," Edwards said.

On Wednesday, Burr said in an interview that Edwards had distorted Coble's comments to make them appear to be "a vicious ethnic attack."

Burr also cited Edwards' opposition to the nomination of Miguel Estrada to the District of Columbia Circuit Court. Edwards is among more than 40 Democrats preventing a vote on President Bush's nominee.

"If John Edwards spent less time pontificating about who should serve as chairman of a House subcommittee and more time focusing on the qualifications of a judicial nominee, perhaps Hispanics in this country could have something to cheer about with Miguel Estrada," Burr said.

An Edwards aide said, without apology, that the office had no plans to respond to Burr.

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